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BODY:

Internet FastFind is Symantec's first 'pure' Internet utility package for Windows 95 and NT 4.0. It consists of eight search-related utilities. Although the Internet is already well populated with powerful text and file search tools, Symantec's pitch is that these are relatively clumsy devices which either return no hits at all or swamp you with hundreds; Internet FastFind aims to alleviate the frustrations that arise when searching for data on the Internet.

Instead of the usual square program window, Internet FastFind uses an attractive pale blue oval image of the world. The eight buttons mounted on this are used to launch its components: WebFind, NetFileFind, EasyFTP, EasyZIP, **PatchConnect**, LiveUpdate, Notify and WebLaunch.

WebFind can be used to search on the Web and has an unusual approach to Web searching. Conventional Web searches generally involve visiting a search engine Web site such as Lycos or Yahoo, whereas WebFind simultaneously hits all the major search engines when it searches. It then collates and 'de-dupes' the results, firing up your browser to present them. Search options are slightly limited, but this is a small trade-off for the convenience of performing comprehensive searches using every major search engine. You also get a search tips button for more efficient searching.

NetFileFind searches FTP sites -- it lets you search for exact or partial matches on file names. You can narrow down the search by specifying the modification date or the Archie site you want to use. Once you've found what you're looking for, you can use another Internet FastFind tool, EasyFTP, to retrieve the files. This utility adds a list of popular FTP sites to the end of Explorer's drive tree, letting you manipulate files located on FTP servers in exactly the same way as you would files on your hard disk. You can even drag and drop to Your desktop, which makes FTP transactions very easy.

EasyZIP is a simple file compression and decompression utility that's also integrated into Explorer, making it simple to deal with zipped files. WinZip users beware: when EasyZIP is installed, it will steal the ZIP file association, effectively disabling WinZip.

PatchConnect allows you to update your software by downloading patches and over the Internet. This isn't a novel feature -- it first appeared in CyberMedia's First Aid for Windows 95 (reviewed 21 August 1996) and then Oil Change, but Symantec's implementation is

slicker. It's not quite as clever as Oil Change in that it doesn't check program version numbers and notify you if a more up-to-date version is available -- **PatchConnect** only takes you to the Web page or FTP site where the updates are located. However, it does extend coverage to hardware drivers.

From now on, all Symantec/Norton products will feature a LiveUpdate button through which you can be connected to Symantec's FTP site to check for product updates. If one is available, it'll be automatically downloaded and Installed, and even though Internet FastFind is brand new there is already an update available for it.

Notify is a handy utility that allows users to select specific Web sites or Web pages for automatic update monitoring. When an updated page is found, it is automatically downloaded and stored locally -- a small flashing triangle on the task bar warns you of an updated page. The final utility, WebLaunch saves you a few keystrokes by listing your favourite Web sites on the task bar, making them easier to launch.

Verdict

Internet FastFind doesn't offer anything dramatically new, but Symantec has done a good job of repackaging existing features. Its tight integration with the Windows 95 and NT 4.0 operating systems is a bonus. If you spend a lot of time scouring the Internet, then it is worth checking out. You can do this for free -- a 30-day trial version of Internet Fastfind is available for download from the Symantec Web site.

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